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Animal Welfare Assessment Tool for On-Farm Euthanasia

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ABSTRACTS OF THE PROCEEDINGS

from an animal welfare perspective. Inappropriate plans may subsequently cause unnecessary suffering or sacrifice of animals. Given the multidisciplinary training of epidemiologists, they are particularly valuable in the preparation for FAD outbreaks, which requires the involvement of people from different backgrounds.

This presentation focuses on what epidemiologists can contribute to FAD outbreak planning with an emphasis on animal welfare. We classify FAD outbreak management into 4 major areas of consideration: (a) disease detection and confirmation, (b) implementing control measures, (c) monitoring the FAD epidemic, and finally (d) the FAD recovery period. Historical outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease and current planning for highly pathogenic avian influenza are used as illustrative examples to discuss animal welfare considerations and how epidemiologists can be involved for each of these areas.

More importantly, the presentation demonstrates why it is necessary to consider the listed areas simultaneously while addressing animal welfare in planning FAD outbreak management.

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By definition, euthanasia means “good death.” According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, this would be death that occurs with minimal pain and distress. Euthanasia techniques should result in a rapid loss of consciousness followed by cardiac and respiratory arrest.

To ensure the welfare of the nonhuman animal during euthanasia, the process must include the ability to induce loss of consciousness and death with minimal pain, distress, anxiety, or apprehension; must include timeliness of the onset of unconscious and death; must be reliable; and must be irreversible and compatible with species, age, and health status. Even though the criteria have been established, a tool has not been developed for producers to assess whether the criteria are being met within their current euthanasia program.

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An on-farm assessment tool needs to consist of auditable points that are not only easy to quantify but also allow producers to measure the performance of individual employees and effectively manage their euthanasia program. The areas to be assessed should include training, preeuthanasia procedures, application, effectiveness of euthanasia method, efficiency of the process, and the maintenance of equipment.

By giving livestock caregivers the tools to assess their current policy, procedures, and employee performance, they will be equipped to verify that the criteria for euthanasia are being met. In turn, this will ensure the welfare of the animal during the euthanasia process.